

Tak water of that well, and wash his tongs,

whole

And it is hoole anon. Heer is a
miteyn eek, that ye may see. He
that his hond will putte in this
miteyn, He shal have multiplying
of his greyn, "Whan he hath
sowen, be it whete or otes,
Provided that he give tne pence or
groats So that he office pens or elles
grotes.¹

The Pope and the prelates were not perhaps responsible for the worst tricks that the Pardoners played on the people, any more than they were responsible for all that the Summoners did in summoning to the Church Courts. But in both cases they were responsible for the system, and for the encouragement of beliefs on which it was based. They could not have made a more cruel misuse of power than they did, by thus sending vile quacks with official letters of introduction round the up-country villages, to deceive a simple and ignorant peasantry, who knew no reason for rejecting anything that came to them from the great world beyond their ken. The coarsest superstitions, that were rejected in the towns with rude laughter, were palmed off on the unfortunate rustic by the agents of the Pope and the Bishops.

The pardon of sins for money, which we have seen going on under one form in the Ecclesiastical Courts, and under/ another in the sale of indulgences,² was not unknown in th^e confessional. It was only another phase of the decline of real belief in absolution by confession and penance. The laity had not yet abandoned the form, although they had ceased to feel the spirit of that Sacrament. The husk was still left, the kernel was gone. The system had become, in fact, a superstition. Men kept and paid confessors to assail them of whatever sins they chose to commit. The demand for such accommodation was supplied by the friars, who met the laymen half way. They successfully competed with the parish priests, who were more conscientious, or at any rate less forward to advertise their venality. The secular clergy maintained that the parish priest was the proper confessor for every man, but the friars who perambulated the country had

¹ Chaucer, Pardoner's Prologue.

² See Ap.